



restoreing dc

A Monthly Update for Businesses and Consumers in the District of Columbia

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Demystifying the
ER Committee



Anthony A. Williams
Mayor

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EASY ECONOMICS

by Tom Litke

How can inexperienced volunteers address the economic and market conditions of their neighborhood? Economics is very confusing and unpredictable to both experts and novices alike. How can we de-mystify this “dismal science” for community residents to make their local business districts a positive shopping and dining experience? As the saying goes, there are two ways; the easy way and the hard way. In this newsletter, reSTORE DC will address the easy way; next time, we’ll address the hard way.

Main Street programs assemble people interested in understanding their local business environment and who want to help reposition it to today’s market place. While most people are aware that retail shopping today is very different than ten or twenty years ago, we still encounter merchants who hang on to the traditional ways of merchandising and customer service. Volunteers can help merchants update their business style while supporting the business district in general. These volunteers meet in an “Economic

Restructuring,” or ER, Committee which sounds a lot more complicated than it is. It may sound like some urban renewal project that will overhaul the local marketplace, but it isn’t. It’s a thoughtful group of local people who use their observations to make minor adjustments step by step. Who are the members? They are residents who shop locally and wonder why parking spaces are all full, when stores are half empty; they are visitors who wonder why the stores close at 5 pm, when workers typically get home from work at 6 pm; they are merchants watching local grocers, hardware stores and florists shut their doors after 20 years. They may not have special economic skills, but they have what it takes to join the ER Committee. Like them, you don’t have to know the answers, but you should be interested in these questions — after all, it’s your community.

Tom Litke works for reSTORE DC/DC Main Streets as an advisor to the DC Main Street programs. Prior to his work in DC, he directed a nationally-recognized Boston Main Street.

ENLISTING VOLUNTEERS IN BUSINESS DISTRICT REVITALIZATION

Let’s de-mystify the ER Committee. What projects can volunteers complete that require no special skills but support their local business district? The most popular projects in the District of Columbia include:

Develop a Business Directory. Can you identify the number of businesses in your community and what services they provide? Most people recognize the local dining spots, but don’t realize second floor offices are full of accountants, doctors and travel agencies. In a large neighborhood like Dupont Circle, there are simply too many businesses to remember them all and their location. If you factor in the amount of people that are transplanted to the District from other states and countries and have no idea where to purchase goods or services, a Business Directory is a crucial publication. Two

to four part-time volunteers can create a business database in spreadsheet form and publish it in a modest format in six to eight weeks. Updating the Directory quarterly would take two volunteers less than one day.

Provide a List of Training Sessions for Businesses. Did you know approximately 100 training sessions for businesses are held in the District of Columbia each month? More importantly, do your local businesses know? Every month, local community organizations should provide a list of training sessions hosted by reSTORE DC, the Enhanced Business Information Center, the Latino Economic Development Corporation and numerous Small Business Development Centers (for a more complete list, see inset box). These groups help clients develop business plans, market their businesses, get



DUPONT CIRCLE MERCHANT MIXER
FEB 21, 2006.

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loans and offer technical assistance. ER Committee members don't have to worry about providing training; they just have to know where to find it. Developing the List might take two volunteers less than eight hours each. Maintaining the list should take 2-4 hours each month.

Track Available Commercial Spaces. If volunteers want to assist in the repositioning of the marketplace, they should participate in the transformation. ER committees should keep a current list of commercial properties available for leasing. Making life a little easier for a prospective tenant can be as simple as providing the floor plan, dimensions and contact information for an available space. If you want to help in getting the right retail mix, this is a must. Tracking available spaces (identify, retrieve data, and document) can take approximately 1-2 hours per property.

Host a Business Mixer. If recruiting businesses is challenging, another option is to help existing business grow. One of the easiest ways is to offer a venue for business to introduce themselves to each other and network. The Mid-City Business Association has been successful in hosting a monthly event where businesses along the U Street Corridor learn more about providing goods and services to fellow businesses. Six volunteers can expect to dedicate four hours each to developing the first Mixer; after that, 1-2 hours each per event.

Write an Article. Keep your community, no matter how big or how small, in the eyes and minds of folks outside your neighborhood. Have an interesting business nearby? Tell the world about it! They might have had their 25th anniversary or their Grand Opening; been the first computer local store or the last television repair shop; your first national franchise or a 3rd generation family-owned business. Put on your reporter's hat and get the scoop. Don't be concerned with sales figures or market share at this point; readers like to know the human side, and the people behind the businesses are what makes it interesting. Depending on the writer, a 600-word article with editing might take approximately 4-5 hours.

Provide updates. An important role for Main Street programs is to keep businesses informed on local events that affect their businesses. Will roads be closed for streetscape improvements? Is a department store moving in nearby? Will a bus route be added locally? All of these events have occurred in our

neighborhoods and directly affected sales, and all these events will occur again. The sooner the merchants are well informed, the better chance they can make educated decisions on behalf of their business. And they will appreciate the time and effort put into protecting their livelihood.

None of these projects make you think of "economic" or "restructuring" but I guarantee they all affect customer sales in your community. The projects listed are all volunteer-driven and they all make a dramatic impact; and maybe, best of all, they're all fun and easy! Stay tuned as reSTOREDC dedicates the next newsletter to building more advanced tasks onto these easy projects as we develop a more comprehensive strategy for commercial revitalization through its committees.

BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

Business Name	Telephone	Website
DC Small Business Development Center (SBDC)	(202) 806-1550	dcsbdc.org
DC SBDC University of DC	(202) 274-7030	dcsbdc.org/locations.htm
DC SBDC Anacostia Economic Development Corporation	(202) 889-5090	dcsbdc.org/locations.htm
National Women's Business Center	(202) 785-4922	www.womensbusinesscenter.org
Marshall Heights CDO	(202) 396-1201 x162	www.mhcdo.org
Southeastern University Center for Entrepreneurship	(202) 478-8231	www.seu.edu
DC Bar Probono	(202) 737-4700	www.dcbbar.org
Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)	(202) 272-0390	www.scoredc.org
Washington Area Community Investment Fund (WACIF)	(202) 529-5505	www.wacif.org
Enhanced Business Information Center (e-BIC)	(202) 727-2241	restoredc.dc.gov/ebic

NOTE: This list is not comprehensive. We will have more in the next newsletter!



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